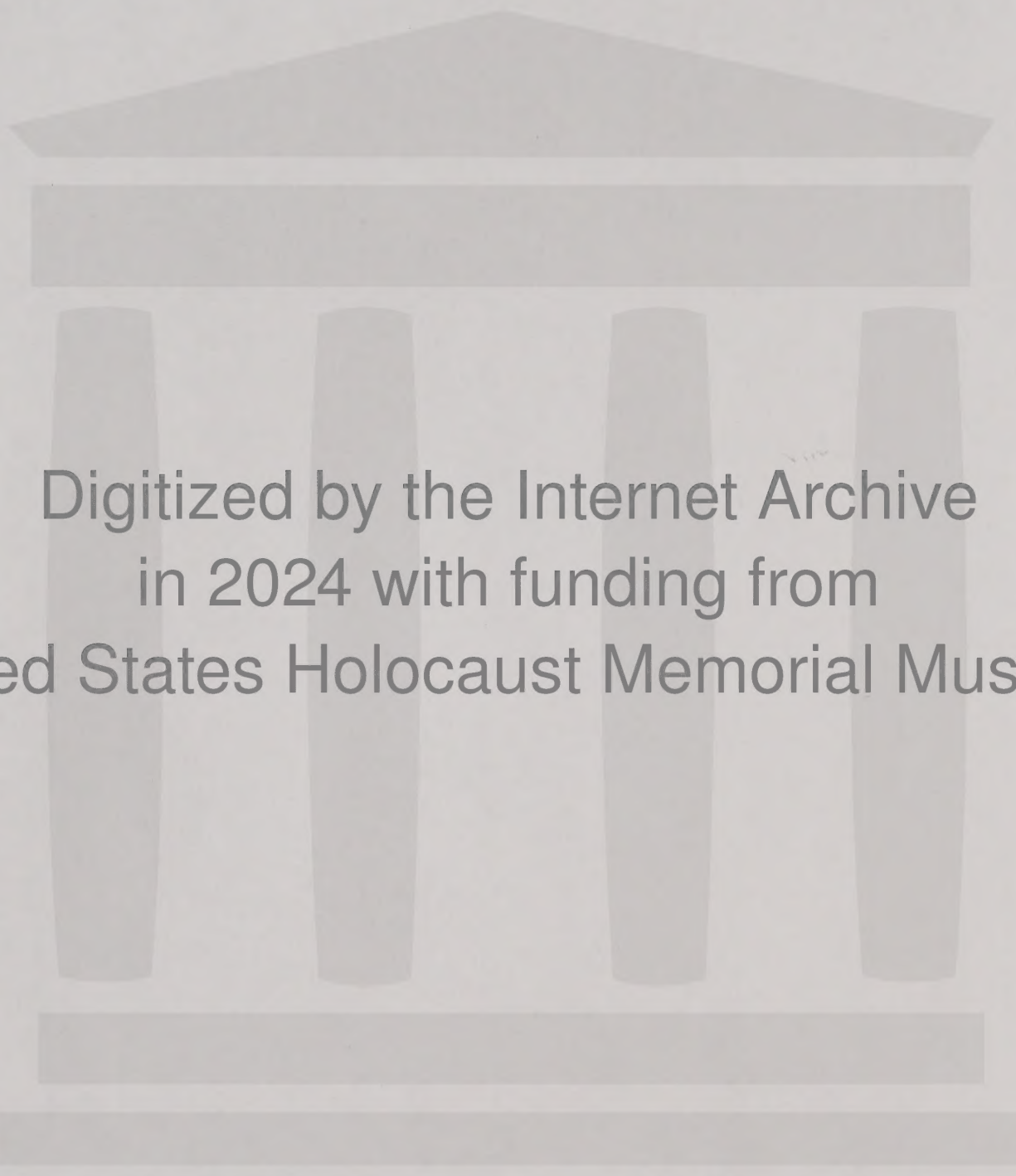




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W A R

by Pinhas Tinne

Written in Displaced Persons Camps Adgastein-Elbsburg, Austria
1945 - 1946

"Where will you run to, where?" my neighbor asked angrily, speaking mainly to my wife when he saw that she wouldn't stop badgering me. She was ready to flee at any cost, even on foot. We had just returned with all our baggage from the train station. No train had come. "You think that he won't get you? As far as I'm concerned, better we should meet him here where we belong, at home, and what will be with all the Jews will be with us. There are so many other Jews in the wide world out there. Do you want to be smarter than the whole world? Better go prepare some food and don't be so sad!" He then added, "They say that many have fled, and I suppose with good reason." He stopped for a moment to lick the paper on the cigarette he was rolling. "We adults and these little ones," pointing to my 3 children sitting on the side, sad, with their heads bowed. "Who will hurt us? Must we really believe all the stories about people being killed? Those are only false rumors not worth paying attention to. I've lived among the Germans, and in the First World War I served with them. Under the German officer I did as I pleased, made the best deals. It's true, they are stupid racists and are ready at the slightest provocation to finish you off. But still, it's possible to manage. It's not as terrible as it sounds. Of course there's a war on now, and no one knows who will come out all right and who won't come out at all. But we mustn't despair. God will help." I saw some relief on the faces of my wife and daughters, and to tell the truth I felt somewhat encouraged by the words of my neighbor, Velvel Kushnir, of blessed memory.

After he left our house, I paced the room. "It's really not logical," I said to myself, "that they would kill innocent people, especially not little children."

I looked out to the street. Tremendous noise and commotion. Tanks and all types of vehicles were traveling in all directions with deafening hooting and honking. Rows of people, heads bowed, barely dragging their feet, covered with dust from head to foot, were passing by. As I looked at them carrying their bags and their rifles on their backs, it seemed to me that they had been dragging themselves along forever,

with no one ever stopping to extend a helping hand. They were from a different world, I thought, not like me, in my own home.

My wife and daughters, exhausted by fear and sorrow and by all the events of the last few days, fell asleep in their clothes. Just a few days ago they were happy little girls, free of worry. And now? I watched them as they slept and saw the tension on their faces so similar to that seen on the faces of adults. Who can help them? Who can help ease their pain? I left the room broken-hearted.

Again I looked out the window. Quiet and empty, as though no one had passed there. Slowly, slowly, as with creeping steps, evening fell. I didn't even consider lighting the hearth, but still I closed the curtains. In this time of war, better the house should be dark. I locked the door and was about to get into bed when I heard someone tapping at the window. Panic. "The Germans have arrived," I thought, "and I'll be the first to meet them." "Don't be afraid," the soft voice said in Russian. Another Russian soldier, not a German. "I came to tell you that we're going to blow up the railway tracks. Be calm and don't worry, you hear? Nothing will happen to you! Goodbye!" I answered nothing, and the soldier went his way.

The explosions shattered the quiet of the night. Every blast tore at my heart. A terrible fear gripped me and I shuddered. As the sounds of the explosions became dimmer and dimmer, I felt a kind of longing for a loved one whose grave was being covered. I lay on the sofa, crumpled, thinking about what was happening all around me. I recalled the days of World War I with sleepless nights such as these when the Russians were retreating from the German forces to the other side of the River Styr. I was then living in the town of Tchartorisk, my birthplace. I had felt the same fear and trembling then. Those had been the wild and ignorant Cossacks that had so terrified me. They had cruelly pillaged and raped, and our only hope had been that the cultured Germans would come to save us from the claws of the Cossacks. And now, after such a short period of time, what a shocking reversal! I now desperately wished that the Cossacks would return to save us from the hands of the cultured Germans. And with these depressing thoughts I fell asleep on the sofa.

I was waked by the sound of wooden boards being smashed. It was still outside. "They're probably breaking the doors of the Jews' homes as in all wars," I thought. The voices were so close that I expected them to burst in at any moment. Carefully I moved the curtain aside and saw a group of young gentiles, without

uniforms but armed with rifles, carrying bundles and goods from the blown-up railroad storehouses. They loaded all the loot onto dozens of wagons and drove off. This time, thank God, no Jew was hurt.

Dawn broke. It was a bright and warm day. I was drawn as though by a cable to venture out onto the street. The air was pure, and the special aroma from the nearby pine forest, typical in Manyevitz at this time of summer, wafted on the gentle breeze. I felt a bit easier, but my heart dropped at the sight of the crippled tanks and armored vehicles abandoned on the sides of the dirt road that led from Kovel in the west, through Manyevitz, to Sarny in the east. I counted 83 such vehicles, all that I could manage to see. "An uneven number. A bad omen," I thought, and this foolish superstition would not leave me. I tried to think of other things. I thought of all the labor of the thousands of people, many of them starving, that had been invested in the creation of these monsters of destruction, now lying as useless corpses.

My attention turned to a few Jews who were cautiously coming out of their houses, one by one. When they saw me standing near my gate, they came near. One of them greeted me and joked, "It seems that we're an independent and free republic. No one is around. What do you say to that?" Another burst in saying, "Who needs us? It's impossible to leave by train, the bridges of the railroad have been blown up. And who's going to come through the bogs and sands to help us? Do you think Manyevitz is a priority? The Germans have gone to the north and to the south." "Yes, on the paved roads of Poland to their other flanks. In that way they're cutting the front in two, as with a scissors, and in a few months they'll finish off the Bolsheviks. Are you making light of German power?" A third Jew, not satisfied with the analysis of the situation, interrupted, saying, "Do you hear noises from there?" waving towards Lutsk-Rovno. "What do you think? That they'll win so fast?" The other replied, "Of course it will take time, but the Germans will win out. They've already taken over so many countries with their large factories. They already rule over most of the world, so do you think they're afraid of Bolsheviks? And what's more, all the Ukrainians support the Germans. They say that hundreds of thousands have voluntarily turned themselves in." "So what's so good about that? Do you think that under the Germans life will be so sweet for them? Wait, wait. You'll yet thank God that you were left alive." But the discussion was cut short by the sudden appearance of gentiles from the neighboring village, and all of us dispersed in fright to our homes.

The gentiles from the surrounding villages, together with their wives and children, were arriving from every direction, streaming in from every path that led to our town. Like flying insects that land on blossoming trees with an ear-splitting hum on summer nights, so fell the gentiles with wild cries on the Soviet-owned warehouses. For three consecutive days they stole all the government goods. We Jews were thankful that we weren't harmed.

The fourth day of the pillaging was on a Sunday. That morning the gentiles appeared with sawed-off shotguns that they could easily hide under their coats after shooting. They spread out in organized fashion between the houses of the Jews. Very few Jews resisted; some left their homes. The gentiles shouted that the Germans had given them permission to do with us as they wished but that they were sparing our lives. Some Jews managed to hide some things with their neighbors, "good gentiles." But only those who had had time to sew patches onto their pants and coats remained clothed. Others were stripped of their clothes and shoes and were left standing in the street in their underwear. The vandals ransacked the houses and grabbed everything that came to hand, leaving only a bit of bread. "Anyhow the Germans are coming soon and will kill you all. You won't need anything any more, and your property belongs to us because this is our land." Whatever the rioters didn't manage to take, they smashed. Chaos reigned in every Jewish home: clouds of feathers, ripped material, flying mattresses and springs, broken mirrors. Ritual objects and pages of holy books were thrown about, the only property left for the Jews. From the floor I lifted a page from the Book of Psalms and read, "Give us help from trouble, for vain is the help of man." (Chapter 60, verse 13).

My heart froze. Woe, woe that we live among such people. But what could be done? My wife and children no longer asked for any kind of escape since rumors had reached us that all those who had attempted to flee had been murdered. They agreed with me that after the great rampage our troubles would be over. After all, six days had already passed since the Russians had left Manyevitz. During that time there had been only one incident when the Germans had arrived on motorcycles, and even then had stayed for only two hours. But they had managed to order a Pole to beat up the Jew who was asking for the rent owed him, and we realized how vulnerable our lives were. The Jew recovered after a few weeks and thanked God that nothing worse had befallen him.

Manyevitz was among the few towns in the District of Wolyn where ghettos were not set up by the Germans. Apparently the Nazis, may their memories be blotted out forever, did not want to oppress the Jews to the extent that they would escape to the forests around Manyevitz and join the partisans. But we Jews in our innocence believed that the reason was that they took pity on us after the great pillage. After the rampaging and looting, the Ukrainians said that the Germans had told them to kill us all, but that they, the Ukrainians, as devout Christians, didn't want to spill the blood of the guiltless. The Jews knew that the Ukrainians, their enemies, were lying, and they comforted themselves with the thought that since they were not communists and had nothing to do with politics, the Germans would not cause them harm. It is in this vein that they poured out their hearts one to the other.

The Catholics, a minority in the town, organized a police force in which only Poles served. Very few Poles had participated in the riots. But the police began to round up Jews who still had something in their possession together with Christians with whom they didn't get along. In a cellar, together with 15 other Jews and 5 Christians, was I. We were given no food, but there was nothing to take from home. For 3 days we were beaten with rifle butts, only the Jews among us, until we were black and blue, unable to sit or to lie down. Three days after we were released, we were arrested again. This time a few more Jews were added to the group. It was on the Sabbath, at noon, when a gang of "Zelenovtsy," Ukrainians who called themselves "The Green Army," burst in, and the Jews were beaten until they could barely breathe.

By some miracle I was not beaten this time. They would have continued except for an argument that broke out between them and the Polish police because the Ukrainians had taken over the situation. They forgot about us, and in the evening we were released.

Hunger increased from day to day, and we forgot our other troubles. Every bit of bread or a piece of a potato was a treasure. A few Jews, I among them, decided to walk to Troyanuvka, a distance of 18 kilometers, to ask Jews for some food. They had not been robbed. The gentiles of the town had prevented the gentiles from the nearby villages from coming in to steal, and when one gang had succeeded to break into Troyanuvka, its leader was shot by a German.

The Jew of Troyanuvka explained that because they were more diligent than the Jews of Manyevitz in carrying out religious commands, God had performed a

miracle for them. It was Tisha B'Av, and I entered a synagogue to pray from the Book of Lamentations.

We were given as much food as the Jews could spare. And thus, loaded down with bundles we arrived home exhausted. It was the happiest day of my life; I had brought flour and other necessities. It seemed that luck was shining down on us: the next day a Christian acquaintance brought us ½ sack of flour, potatoes and salt, which was at that time a great luxury. What else could we ask? Another local Christian returned some pillows and blankets that he had stolen during the great pillage. We put straw on the tops of the cupboards and the smashed buffet and made ourselves places to sleep - better than the hard floor. We slept like kings.

Within a short time we collected some broken vessels from the dumps of trash, and from broken pots we made dishes. Among the refuse we found a box containing a new cuspidor, and it served us well for cooking. All these things we washed and scoured with sand. There were no spoons to be found, and at first one spoon served almost all the neighbors. In time, we adjusted to these difficulties as well.

The Christian community in the city Kovel was ordered to set up its own council. Top positions were given to rabid antisemites and to officials the Soviets had dismissed from their government positions. The Jews were ordered to set up a Judenrat and to wear a white band with a red Magen David on their right arms. That was the first symbol to set the Jews apart from the rest of the population.

Reactions varied. Some felt demeaned to the depths of their souls, that their arms were on fire. Some felt that they were proudly displaying who they were. Some considered it akin to the tzitzit - the fringes on the tallit (prayer shawl). But most felt humiliation. According to the new edict, whoever lost the armband would be shot.

Most were ready, however, to endanger their lives by not complying. The result was that after a few weeks the order was given to exchange the armband for round yellow patches which were to be worn on the left side of the chest and on the back, and forbidden to appear on the right arm. Again, almost everyone became apathetic to this demand.

Craftsmen endangered their lives by inventing all sorts of excuses to go to neighboring villages to work for the farmers only for food.

Conditions in the town eased somewhat. Potatoes and flour somehow became available. The German authority ordered the return of the Jews' stolen goods, but this

brought back only broken benches and worn-out clothes, the Ukrainians having kept the good things for themselves. After the big rampage, Jews felt sorry for each other and shared whatever they could. But now, with the slight change in the situation, pity disappeared and people were ready to skin each other alive for a potato. The claims that no one knew what the morrow would bring didn't help.

One Pole purposely spread the rumor that the Germans had taken Moscow and that Stalin's son, who had supposedly been taken prisoner, had made a speech in Berlin which called on his father to quit the war and to give all the Jews over to the Nazis.

Despite the fact that there was no mail service, nor was there a newspaper, rumor after rumor reached Manyevitz. The Jews were afraid to leave their homes after dark, and every day the rumors became more terrifying. One had it that a Jew was hanged because a picture had been found in his pocket. Therefore, the Jews concluded, whoever went to Kovel must not take pictures with them. At the same time, Manyevitz doubted that this could be true - to hang someone because of a picture? But what could be done? This was war. Then suddenly, another horrible rumor: in Rovno 15,000 Jews had been rounded up and annihilated. But before they were shot they had been forced to dig their own graves. Again the Jews debated among themselves if such a thing could be true. Dudl of Sevchaver had brought the bitter news. But Velvel Kushnir and Joseph the blacksmith put it all down to baseless foolishness. "Just like that, to take 15,000 Jews, force them to dig their own graves and then murder them? Better wrap yourselves in your tallitot and pray before the Ukrainian police come here, too."

Indeed, such a monstrous rumor was difficult to believe, but deep in the heart of every Jew fear and terror grew upon hearing all the stories, true or false, and we all sank into bitterness. In spite of this, the quarreling over a scrap of food continued. The many Jews who were ashamed to beg went about like walking dead, their faces yellow and their eyes dim. It was the time of bright, warm summer days, but for us they were dark and drenched with tears.

We saw no Germans. The Ukrainians were the power in town, and every day they issued new decrees such as a head tax. But this only increased the hatred and jealousy among the Jews. Instead of helping one another, each one trampled on whomever they could only to save themselves. In the end, all were hurt. That is the picture of life during the last six weeks, until the 3rd day of Ellul, September 21st, 1941.

Before that time, refugees whom the Germans had driven out from Terespol had found shelter in Manyevitz. They had been chased out from the western side of the River Bug eastward to the area of Manyevitz. From Manyevitz many of them continued eastward together with a large number of residents from the town to the city of Kovel. They would be safer in the big city than in the town, they had reasoned.

After the Germans had ordered the gentiles to return the goods they had stolen from the Jews, the community felt that if the Germans had been in the town at the time of the riots, the great pillage would not have taken place. After all, they rationalized, such an authority would not allow such anarchy. The Germans, claimed the Jews, were not so coarse as the gentiles who walked around in 'lappetess' (homemade sandals woven from the bark of trees). We began to believe in the humanity of the Germans, and it was this blind faith that misled us until the very end.

The Ukrainians then in power would not accept even the meager extent of the Judenrat's authority in the Jewish community, i.e., alleviating somewhat the distress due to the lack of food and livelihood. The general feeling was that despite the difficult conditions, life was beginning to return to a kind of routine. The rumors spread that the Ukrainians encouraged the Gestapo to take the Jews out to work. No one dared to react. Work was work, the Jews agreed, and after all, this was war. Many Jews told of how during World War I the Germans had taken people out to work, and, however much they had suffered, they had survived.

It was at that time that I lived through an experience worse than that suffered by any Jew in Manyevitz. The second to the Commander, the son of a priest, who had worked together with me during the period under Soviet rule, began to bully me. He hated me because he had been fired from his job due to an incident of theft. The truth was that my intervention on his behalf had saved him from being sent to Siberia. And now he wanted to shoot me.

One morning, as I was standing at the window looking out at the empty street, I saw in the distance two policemen coming towards my house. My heart told me that they were coming for me, and without a second's hesitation I ran out the back door. I squeezed myself through an opening in the gate (I was afraid to open it for fear that someone would be suspicious) and ran into my neighbor's barn. The police entered my home and began to beat my wife and children to reveal where I was. They returned to my house several more times. For two days my family didn't know of my

whereabouts. On the third day, hunger got the better of me; I was too weak to stand on my feet. Before that I had eaten very little since whatever food we managed to get we reserved for the children. I decided to let my family know where I was. Through an opening in the barn roof I could see our back door, but, as though to spite me, the door didn't open all day.

Before evening my little daughter Rochele came out of the house. I quickly came down from the barn's loft and squeezed myself through the same opening in the gate and crawled on all fours to the fence. Very softly I called her name. She was terribly frightened but recognized my voice. She looked around, and when she saw me, tears of joy at my being alive shone in her eyes. She told me how the police had been coming every day and had whipped them to reveal my hiding place, and then she showed me the welts all over her body. At home they believed I had been shot, and a rumor to that effect had spread throughout the entire town. She ran into the house to tell my wife and her sisters that I was alive. I was filled with great pain for my family's suffering on my account.

I forgot my hunger and decided to return home, but when my little Rochele saw that I was about to climb over the fence, she begged me not to do so and made me swear that I wouldn't. The wisdom in her large eyes stopped me. She asked me to wait until nightfall when all the family would come to see me. I lay on the ground unable to move my limbs. A great sorrow enveloped me; I blamed myself for this terrible tragedy. No one else in town had been beaten as had my wife and children, and no one had been forced to hide as I was hiding. And who knew how long we would have to continue suffering? I tortured myself for not having listened to my wife and children who had wanted to escape.

The whisper of "Tatte" brought me back to reality. My wife and my three children were sitting on the ground on the other side of the fence. "What's new?" I asked. I hoped to hear that by some miracle the Nazis had been attacked or stopped by the Soviets. It was unthinkable that the Soviets had surrendered and that not one Jew had been left alive. "Nothing new," my wife answered sorrowfully, which meant the Germans were advancing. My wife told me that she had gone to the head of the Ukrainian council and had asked that he stop the police from beating her and the children. He promised that he would see to it.

With a heavy heart I returned to the loft in the barn. I arranged a place to lie down among the rotten rags, broken boxes and smelly sacks so that in case someone should come up to the loft it would be difficult to find me. Contact with my family was through Rochele. Every day, early in the morning and in the dark of evening she brought me a piece of bread, some potatoes and a pitcher of water. The potatoes were not peeled so as to save on salt. I could have somewhat eased my hunger and aggravation with the cramped conditions if only I could smoke. Rochele brought me some cigarette stubs she'd found in the street, and that's what I smoked. This did help ease the tension.

But all that time I was terrified that someone would come to look for me. For days I looked through the cracks of the roof at the empty street below and down at the flowering lilac bushes next to the barn. The leaves were still green and the birds flitted from branch to branch twittering to each other. How I envied them! They could fly wherever they wished. Oh, why didn't I have wings, I thought, or at least a body slim enough to slip into the metal stove pipe that had been thrown onto the loft. A little, weak cat used to visit me every day and look at me with pity. It climbed on my legs and slid on my body, and I felt as though a child was trying to comfort me.

Those days of pain and suffering seemed an eternity. Thought of what was in store for us filled me with dread. The Angel of Death stood before my eyes. I was so depressed that I wanted to turn myself in and put an end to this bitter life. But even during those moments of despair a trace of hope entered my spirit and I dwelled on happier thoughts. Help must come from somewhere! Now I am considered an animal, or some other creature that can and must be done away with - only because I am a Jew. In the end, justice will prevail and my pursuers will come to a bitter end. But will I live to see the day? It is that wish that gave me no rest: that I should live to see the downfall of my enemies.

With time I got used to living in the "boidem" (loft), close to the little birds. The police had stopped beating my family, and the searches for me were infrequent. I began to clean my "apartment," attacking first of all the spiders that clung to every corner and seemed to want to trap me in their webs. I waged an all-out battle and won at least in the corner I had chosen as "home." Despite the proper sleeping arrangements, I was not allowed to sleep a single night. As soon as I lay on my "bed" covered with rags, thousands of fleas descended onto me and attacked my thin skin

until they drew blood. I was helpless against them. At night I quietly went down to the barn floor and paced to and fro, listening to the cows chewing their cud and sighing heavily from time to time.

Once, before dawn, the owner of the barn, Yeshayahu Zweibl, came up to the loft and found me. He visited me often after that. One day he told me that he had succeeded in getting a permit to visit his old father who lived in the town of Griva, but he was afraid to go alone. I advised him to leave immediately as I had a premonition that some great danger was imminent.

He left, and about a half hour later, I saw through the cracks of the barn a convoy of eight or ten canvas-covered vehicles decorated with swastikas. They were driving towards the "Gemeinde" (the Council). I didn't know what that meant, and I was seized with terror. I didn't know what to do, where to hide. Maybe in the box of feathers? Nobody would think of looking there. Then too, I could roll myself into a ball and hide in the pile of trash outside the barn. But someone would have to cover me, and who would do it? And thus I ran back and forth like a madman without being able to find a place to protect myself. I shook all over but couldn't grasp why I was so afraid. The little cat, my true companion, kept running underfoot. If only I could turn into a cat or a miserable dog - only not to be a Jew.

I tried to get ahold of myself and kept on looking for a hiding place. Suddenly my neighbor's wife appeared with tears in her eyes and begged me to leave at once. "They're rounding up men to take to work, and the Ukrainian police let it be known that if any family were found to be harboring a Jew, they would all be shot. Please don't endanger the lives of my children or my own life."

Without a second's hesitation I came down from the loft and went outside the barn, not knowing where to turn. I saw my house over the fence, but didn't dare go near it. I remembered that between our ceiling and the roof there was a space of about 90 centimeters. Perhaps I could hide there. But if I were to be caught, I would endanger the lives of my wife and my three daughters (Fanya, Rivka and Rochele). I looked around and saw none of them, not my wife nor my daughters.

It was 9 o'clock in the morning. The sun, in a holiday spirit, shone in its full glory and sent its rays over the rooftops in the town, caressing the golden cross over the church. The skies were clear, and all around there was a pleasant quiet, so pleasant that I didn't want to move. But suddenly, two young members of the Judenrat came

racing up the street, their faces ashen, their eyes bulging out of their sockets. "Help!" they shrieked. "Give us all the eggs you have. The head of the Zonderkommando ordered us to bring 400 eggs. Hurry, hurry! They gave us 15 minutes to bring in the eggs or all the men who've been rounded up will be shot!" They took the eggs from the woman and ran off to where the men had been concentrated.

They hadn't noticed me standing there. I remained frozen. I couldn't tear myself away from the warm rays of the sun and the clear skies. It had been four weeks since I'd felt this freedom, and I felt as one just released from prison. I don't know how long I stood rooted there as one bewitched, until the woman's brother came running and panting, a sack under his arm and a scythe on his shoulder. Without stopping, he gasped, "They're catching, they're catching! Come with me through your garden to "Butchenitza," (a railroad siding), and from there we'll go the fields to cut grass for the cattle. Come quickly, Pinhas. On our street they've already caught everyone. The Ukrainian police and the Germans will be here any minute." "No, I'm not going," I answered firmly. "As you wish," he said sadly, climbed over the fence and disappeared.

I heard gunshots accompanied by the shouts of "Halt!" coming closer. Danger is near, I thought, but was not afraid. I went to my neighbor's fence and calmly tore out two planks. I squeezed into the garden, returned the planks to their proper place and lay on the ground for a moment. I then crawled through the furrows of the potato patch until I reached the rear wall of the barn, where the lilac bushes grew. There I joined a young Jew who was hiding. We both sat hunched up, not saying a word.

On the other side of the fence was a wide path leading directly to where the men from our streets had been taken - exactly opposite where we were hiding. I glanced around to make sure that no one had spotted us and began to watch what was happening there. About 50 Jews were lying on the ground in rows, facing down. A fat, red-faced German, wearing a white shirt with rolled-up sleeves was running up and down between the rows, whip in hand. He whipped the head and face of every man that was brought in. Two policemen from the Zonderkommando grabbed the victim by his legs and his arms and swung him from side to side until he was placed with the others in straight rows, Prussian style.

Within a few moments, a large truck arrived, and a number of policemen jumped off. With their rifle butts they beat the men who were lying quietly on the

ground, half dead. They then got them up and hustled them onto the truck. Whoever couldn't climb up on his own was grabbed by two soldiers and flung in like a log until the truck was full. It then drove off.

All around us there was a terrible, depressing silence, as heavy as the silence in a graveyard. I lay among the bushes, unable to digest what I had seen. No one cried, no one screamed. It seemed to me that the shouts of the police and the shrieks of the bullets were swallowed up in this dreadful silence. Every step had been carried out quickly and efficiently, like the carrying of a dead father from his home, leaving little orphans behind.

Out of the corner of my eye I glanced at my partner-in-hiding, wanting to ask him if he had witnessed the same scene as had I. But his face was contorted in anguish, and in his eyes was the look of madness. I wanted us to pour out our feelings to ease our pain. But suddenly the voices of gentiles were heard, and I said nothing.

Not far from the barn where we were hiding was a smithy that belonged to gentiles. The Ukrainian murderers from all the surrounding villages had gathered there to assist the Germans in their "work." I couldn't see them, but I recognized the voice of the main speaker, Stepan. He worked for the Jewish lumber dealers as guard. I heard the conversation between him and his Ukrainian companions:

"Nu, did you catch anyone?"

"No, I'm sorry to say."

"Yes, we must be careful. Our commander, Mikola Slipchiuk, said that the Germans ordered the Ukrainian police not to get involved, and whoever tried would be shot. And with the Germans, brother, you don't mess. With them an order is an order, not like with us. We talk; they shoot."

A third voice joined in: "Where did you get the box, brother? It doesn't suit you. For your tobacco you use a pouch. A box like that is for the wealthy; they smoke rolled cigarettes."

"I found it near the shop of Nyoma, the blacksmith. It's probably made of silver. Oh well, the children will have something to play with. But what a time I had with Nyoma! Listen. I come in alone and Nyoma is sitting there. 'Get up, let's go!' I shout. He doesn't answer, and we walk out of the house. Right away he jumps over Klimchiuk's (a wealthy Ukrainian) fence with one leap, like a dog. The fence must be three meters high."

Another Ukrainian: "The devil only knows where they get so much strength. Many of them tried to escape and jumped off the roofs where they were hiding. God, how much strength they had! But I knew how to find them, the partisans!"

The one with the box: "But Nyoma is truly a hero."

Another: "He held my horse on his shoulders while it was being shoed."

The one with the box: "Listen. I run through the fence to Klimchiuk's yard, and what do I see? Nyoma is fighting with 2 Germans. He holds them down in such a way that neither of them can get away. I don't know what would have happened if I hadn't come. He was choking them, poor fellows."

"Nu, nu, so what happened?"

"I immediately jumped in and cracked him over the head with the butt of my rifle. But he didn't let go. I saw that in another minute he would grab a rifle and shoot all three of us. I looked around, but there was no one I could call to help."

"So you finished him off."

"A smart one you are! The three of them were wrapped around each other fighting. How could I shoot? I could have accidentally killed one of the Germans, God forbid, and then I and my whole family would have been shot. Could I then have explained what happened?"

"Nu, what happened in the end?"

"I quickly took off my belt and wound it around Nyoma's neck and tightened it with all my strength - until his tongue hung out. And then he let go of the Germans and collapsed. What can I tell you? We beat him up good and broke his bones. In the end, his arms hung loose."

"Are you telling the truth?"

"The whole truth, so help me God. His arms just hung there. What he could take, that man; he didn't make a sound! We jumped on him and jumped on him. I don't know how he didn't die. I wanted to shoot him, I was so furious, but the Germans didn't let me."

"And then what happened?"

"What happened? They dragged him to the truck, and that's it!"

Stepan: "And what do you think happened with me? I went into the house of the owner of the big warehouse. He wasn't there. I asked his wife 'Where's your husband?' and she answered, 'He went somewhere, I don't know where.' She was

smiling sweetly. Very pretty, that woman. She wanted to bribe me and came so near to me that her breasts touched my chest. I didn't have time for such things. I began to search under the beds - no one there. I searched in the big warehouse and in the small shed. Nobody. I opened a closet, and what did I see? A boy. 'Come with me. Come to work.' What shall I tell you brothers? She fell on her knees, begging for her son. She kissed my hands and wrapped herself around my legs like a snake. 'Take whatever you want. Shoot me. Stab me. Take me. Let me go in his stead. Please don't take him, I beg of you. He's my only son.' And she cried, 'You too, Stepan, have children. Have pity on him and on me!' What can I say, I really pitied her."

One of the Ukrainians: "Of course. A beautiful Jewish woman can melt the heart of the hardest of men."

Laughter.

Stepan: "That's the truth. I really wanted to let him go, but a German came in just then."

Another: "Really, why don't they take the women, too?"

Others, chiming in: "Wait, wait, don't worry, they'll get them yet. You'll be happy."

Loud laughter.

Suddenly I heard a voice I didn't recognize: "What do you think? Were all of them caught?"

Answers: "Of course not."

Stepan: "I haven't seen Tinne. Have any of you seen him or any others that are missing?"

Answers: "No, as a matter of fact, we haven't seen him."

Stepan: "He disappeared a few weeks ago. We really must find him. He should go with the others."

I shuddered and was seized with such fear and trembling that I wanted to dig a hole under the barn and get swallowed up in it. The young man beside me was yellow. My heart was pounding wildly. It was about to leave my body, I thought, and I recalled a dream I used to have as a child: I was falling through a bottomless abyss, and my heart separated from my body.

Suddenly I heard the voice of someone who had just joined the group. Choking and gasping, he cursed: "Damn them! The places they find to hide! I'm

looking for them all over town, and they - we caught another 14 pieces - in attics, in barns, in chimneys. And how they looked! One we took out of the outhouse."

Loud laughter.

He continued: "No, not only in the outhouse, but in the pit itself. He was covered with excrement, even his beard, but we pulled him out. It was the rabbi's son or his son-in-law. What a sight! What a comedy! We split our sides laughing. The German spit in his face and left us with the command that we were to tie his feet and soak him in the stream until all the stench was washed out."

A number of Ukrainians: "Come on, let's go."

The nightmare continued until nightfall. For us, it seemed forever. After the murderers left, I was as one paralyzed. But then I felt less threatened; at least we were protected by the dark. In the thick bushes, I felt safer as though in a quiet grave. I carefully curled myself up so as not to rustle the leaves or grasses. After that day of tension, of physical and mental torture, I fell asleep.

It was apparently after midnight that a fine rain woke me. At first I shivered with the cold, but the moment I touched my "partner's" hand, I felt warmer and knew that I had to leave the place. The two of us, who had until now not exchanged a single word, crawled out of the bushes on all fours. When we reached the garden, the young man left, and I was alone. Where should I go? Not home, I thought, in case they were waiting to catch me, and not to the loft in the barn where guards may also be waiting. Stealthily I approached the home of the young man with whom I had shared that day of suffering and tried to go in by the back door. It was locked, and I was afraid to knock. I walked towards the front door facing the street. In front of the door was a small, open porch. When I looked there, my heart stopped. About six Ukrainian officers were lying there with their rifles between their legs. I immediately fell to the ground and began to crawl back to the garden. The shgotzim were fast asleep, otherwise they would surely have seen me. Through the soft rain and the gloom, I could still see them, and I crawled further into a small shed.

After this first Aktzia in which the men had been shot and covered over so thoroughly that the place was unidentifiable, the murderers claimed that the men had been taken to work. There were Jews who believed it, despite the fact that among the men who had been caught were the old and the crippled. They chose to believe that

the people among whom they were living were really not blood-thirsty animals that would kill for no reason.

Within a few weeks, the remainder of the men, including myself, began to come out of hiding, and together with all the other miserable, starving and beaten people, went to work. Even 10-year old children were forced to drag logs bigger than themselves onto freight cars. Children over the age of 13 worked at repairing railroad tracks and carrying railroad ties. Girls worked at cleaning the Ukrainian offices, and the Ukrainian officers would purposely dirty the floors of the rooms so that the girls would have to keep cleaning them with their hands, without cloths. Girls were also forced to work at all sorts of demanding jobs.

Thus, without a ghetto, life became unbearable. In addition to hunger and destitution, the Jews suffered humiliation and bullying from every gentile. They bore this burden in the hope that they would somehow overcome those days of misery.

A year later, 1942, also in the month of Elul, a month of disasters, a ghetto was set up in Manyevitz. Like the tolling of a bell, this conveyed the impending annihilation of the few remaining Jews. The explanations of the Ukrainian police who wanted to mollify the rumors, didn't help. After the creation of the ghetto - it was on a Tuesday - the Jews were convinced that on the Sabbath they would be murdered. Everyone debated within himself whether to escape and die of hunger in the swamps or to die by a bullet and put an end to their suffering. In any case, life had no meaning.

If only it were possible to turn into a dog and not be a Jew! People take pity on a miserable dog. Even the devout Christians who knew us, who believed that they were decent and God-fearing, agreed that we should pay with our lives for the sins committed against Jesus. The wealthy Christians claimed that all the Jews were communists, and the poor Christians claimed that not only were we rich but parasites. Each and every one, without exception, justified the extermination of the Jews. We had not one champion. Our fate was sealed.

It was terrible to see the Jews on that last Friday with the yellow patches on their tattered clothes, eyes glazed, walking as dead on their way to work, believing that that was their last day on earth, perhaps their last hour.

I, together with 9 other Jews went to work to chop kindling at the edge of the forest. Two of my daughters, Fania aged 17 and Rivka aged 15, worked at repairing railroad tracks not far from the village Polska Gura. I told them to go to a Christian

acquaintance of mine who lived there and ask him to take them to the partisans even though we as yet had no firm information about them or of their whereabouts. In any event, there was nothing to lose, and I even hoped that the Christian would feel some spark of pity and hide my beautiful daughters. Rochele, my little one, was 13 and looked entirely gentile. She hoped that one of her Christian girlfriends would hide her. My wife had given up on life altogether. And I? As I was hauling logs my mind raced, my conscience tortured me. I felt that at any moment my soul would leave my body and I would finally be at peace. How could I have sent my children to the forest? Perhaps the murderers wouldn't come after all?

The German in charge of the kindling had been decent towards me, and once I had even asked him to save me. On that day, the German called me from a distance. I neared him and saw that he was nervous and his face was white. "Karl, what happened?" I asked. (His family name was Dinwald, and he originally came from the area of Dresden.) "Hide," he whispered and immediately headed towards the town.

I looked at the lovely boy whose father worked together with us. His father urged the child to hurry home to his mother in the town, and he did so. I looked at the town where people were just rising from sleep and did not know that I was leaving them forever.

All 10 of us went into the dense forest. I noticed that Yehoshua Kanonitz, a handsome fellow of 20 (later killed by the Poles), was holding a gun. "Nu," I asked, "are you going to fight the Germans with that?" "Yes," he answered firmly and proudly. "But they won't take me alive. The last bullet is for me." No one answered. Silently we made our way further into the woods, stepping carefully and lightly so as not to draw attention to the snapping of the dry twigs underfoot. We decided to camouflage ourselves in the thick growth near the swamp and to wait until nightfall.

In a short while we were engulfed by the dark and ventured out. Instead of walking on well-worn paths, we pushed our way through the undergrowth, unafraid of hungry wolves or other forest animals. We were terrified only of meeting up with animal-humans. We quickened our steps and then began to run through the brush, driven only by the panic that had taken hold of us as soon as we had come out of hiding. At any moment, someone could appear and snuff out our lives. The sky, a dark blue sprinkled with twinkling stars, hovered over us like a canopy. At last we

reached a clearing in the forest, and our fear left us. It seemed as though we had left death behind us. In this open space, life had won.

Without speaking we sat down on the wet grass. Some of us quietly and in great sorrow welcomed the Sabbath with a Friday evening melody, "Let us be joyful." Each of us then sank into his own thoughts if, indeed, there were any.

I don't know how much time passed, but we were suddenly startled by the sound of airplanes. We imagined that they were following us, and, like frightened goats, we ran into the dense forest. In a short while we heard the sounds of bombing coming closer and closer. We stopped all at once and shouted, "Help has come! The Soviets are bombing Kovel! A miracle from heaven! They've come to rescue us at the very last moment! Oh, God in heaven, save us, so many innocent souls, so many children are at your mercy!"

However, despite the great joy and our belief in the miracle, not one of us thought of turning back. A hidden force drove us to run on and on. With the dawn, after having covered a distance of 30 kilometers, we arrived exhausted to a place near the village of Lishnivka, in the direction of Pinsk. We were afraid to enter the village in daylight and remained in the forest. We gathered some red autumn berries to quiet our hunger.

Such was our first night in the forest.

Post Script: The wife of the author, Leah, and their two daughters, 17-year old Fania and 15-year old Rivka, were taken while on their way to work and killed together with the entire community of Manyevitz by the Germans and the Ukrainians. The third daughter, Rochele, was shot later by a Ukrainian policeman after she had been turned in by a cowherd.

Translated from Yiddish to Hebrew by
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